Concerning Kenya

The Burden Bearer, Kenya Colony

CONCERNING KENYA

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Concerning Kenya

What is Kenya?

Kenya is the youngest British colony, just one year old. It was known till 1920 as British East Africa, and was a protectorate. Then the area under British control in East Africa suddenly grew to nearly three times its former size, through a mandate being given to Britain, for administering the vast country, peopled by 7,500,000 Africans, which was formerly German East Africa. But we are not here concerned with Tanganyika Territory, as this area is now called, which is quite distinct from Kenya Colony.

Kenya, with the addition of the new territory, extends from Abyssinia on the north to Tanganyika Territory on the south, and runs inland as far as Uganda, which is dwarfed by the new colony. Kenya itself covers 247,000 square miles, more than twice the area of Uganda.

No accurate census of Kenya Colony has ever been taken, but it is peopled by some millions of Africans of different races, mainly Bantu-speaking, together with over 20,000 Indians, and 6000 Europeans.

The lowlands of Kenya are healthy, tropical regions; the highlands or central plateaux enjoy a moderate climate, with an average temperature of 78° at noon.

Nairobi, the capital, is the head-quarters of the administration and the central station of the Uganda Railway, which line starts from Mombasa. The population of Nairobi includes 16,000 Indians and 3000 Europeans, and in its vicinity are 400 European farmers and 50,000 labourers.

Kenya Colony boasts the two best harbours on the East African coast, where good harbours are few.

Mombasa has been steadily growing in importance, while Kilindini claims to be the finest natural land-locked and sheltered harbour between Port Said and Delagoa Bay. It is capable of great development as a centre of distribution for the trade of Equatorial Africa.

The Great Need

It is seventy-seven years since the first missionary to East Africa landed at Mombasa. This was J. L. Krapf, trained at Basle and sent out by the Church Missionary Society, in the first instance to Abyssinia. Krapf was shipwrecked, picked up from the sinking vessel, and taken by the rescuing ship to Aden, where he embarked on a trading vessel which, calling at port after port on the coast, carried him to Mombasa. From that day to this, the C.M.S., not alone among the missions, has continued incessantly to sow and reap. Krapf, and those who followed him, met many discouragements, and saw little fruit, but the results of their labours have been immense. They have led to the exploration of the interior of Africa from the east coast, to the discovery of the great inland lakes and the source of the Nile, to the reduction of East African languages to writing, to the ingathering of many Africans into the Church of Christ, and, indirectly, to the establishment of Christian work in Uganda, where tens of thousands have been led to take upon them the yoke of Christ.

The sum and substance of the missionary letters and reports received to-day is this: *The great need of East Africa is Christ.* The message comes in a hundred different forms. A missionary writes: "For a native woman to go and live in Nairobi without the protection of a husband is synonymous with prostitution, and has passed as such into the language." Who else but Christ can remove this mountain of vice? Mr. John H. Harris writes[1]: "The percentage of unmarried white men outside missionary circles who cohabit with African womanhood is deplorably high—probably more than ninety per cent." Who but Christ can strengthen the

[1] "Africa: Slave and Free," p. 163.

African woman against this evil? A missionary report says: "The natives are dangerously open to infection from their constant contact with European settlement. . . . Never was such clay for the potter's use: would that more craftsmen of Christ were here to mould it." Canon Burns writes from Nairobi: "The Sunday services, a great feature, with which the Bishop of Zanzibar was so much amazed, continue to expand. There are from 900 to 1000 attendants at the various classes for spiritual instruction." Another report says: "There never was so favourable an opportunity for launching our offensive if a strong body of effectives was available. All the reports speak of the changing attitude of the chiefs, and of persecution dying out or confined to the out-schools, of food in abundance after a terrible dearth, and of general recovery from the effects of war, famine, and the scourges of dysentery and influenza." Further: "The chiefs are asking for schools." "Progress has been delayed in Mombasa owing to the long absence of foreign staff. The two African agents have kept together the important night school and inquirers' classes, while the congregation has often been more than can be seated." "Our great need is staff—foreign and native. . . . Can the C.M.S. help us at this really critical time?"

High Speed Evolution

Kenya Colony is travelling at high speed. When the older men of to-day were children, the white-faced planter and farmer were unknown in the land. The prosperous Indian trader, now clamouring for equal rights with everybody, had not yet been heard of. The British Crown was but the shadowy emblem of a distant, unknown power. The original concession made to the Imperial British East Africa Company came to an end in 1895, when the territory was transferred to the British Government. But the time of Kenya Colony was not yet. The adventurous spirits of Europe were directing their attention to the Transvaal gold reefs and

the Kimberley diamond mines. The Indian trader was still on the coast.

Then some one discovered that the "portioning of Africa" had left Britain in possession of a large, uncut jewel. The lowlands of the East African protectorate were capable of producing vast supplies of rubber and cotton, coco-nuts and rice; and the highlands offered rich crops and extensive grazing lands. The mineral and forest resources were not yet well ascertained, but there was abundant promise. The construction of the railway, built as a means of opening up Uganda, for ever changed the fortunes of the neighbour protectorate. Numbers of Indian workmen, brought over by the British for construction purposes, decided to remain in the country after the termination of their contracts. Their presence drew others of their own land, husbands were followed by their wives and families, till all India became aware of the bright possibilities in the new settlements overseas, and East Africa began to be called "the America of the Hindu."

The South African war drew attention away from the equatorial regions, but within the protectorate, European and Indian race questions developed, not without bitterness, while to the south, in the German territories, the European official, the trader, the slave owner, and the soldier established for the white man a name and a reputation such as will hardly die out in one generation.

The Effect of the Great War

The African was now face to face with European methods, European morals, European strength. The lurid glare of the European war revealed to the native the violence and intensity of the dreadful forces that were playing about him. Within the time of the present generation Kenya Colony has learnt from the European and the Indian more about race hatred, political antagonisms, vice, greed, and competitive corruption than its own people could have thought of in a thousand stagnant years. The colony to-day contains elements of discord and disruption which are not indigenous, not of its

making, but which have been imported and forced upon it. Into the light soil of primitive custom and childish superstition have been thrust living seeds of deadly virulence, ready to spring up and bear awful fruit.

This is the dark side. It is necessary to recognize it, to bear it in mind, to take account of it; but happily there is a brighter side. The native of Kenya has received also the eternal message of Christian peace and goodwill, however hard it may be for him in the light of recent events to accept it; he has heard of a divine love which overpowers hate and conquers death. The Crown, on its part, has attempted to establish within the Colony the fundamental elements of peaceable and prosperous growth, stable government, and fixed principles of justice and honest dealing. A tireless trading community from both East and West has introduced organized systems of commerce which, under strict restraints of honesty and fair dealing, should conduce ultimately to the material well-being of the whole population; and in this particular the East Indian trader has an important, if secondary place. The British settlers include men of the resourceful, enterprising, hopeful, unconquerable type. The best as well as the worst features of civilization are within the range of attainment. In short, Kenya Colony has been brought to a knowledge of good and evil tenfold deeper than before.

The Outlook To-day

The present result of these drastic influences is a profound and dangerous cleavage in the native life of the country. The chiefs, once paramount, are now a government institution, chosen and paid by Government, without regard to traditional claims. They are no longer clothed with the authority of tribal custom or the sanction of hereditary right. Their position had already become precarious before the war. During the fighting, they remained in the native reserves, while nearly all their young men were thrust into the maelstrom of war. For those who remained at home, life was shorn of the pomp

and picturesqueness of pre-war days; old observances lost much of their significance in the young men's absence. Of those stalwart young natives, 23,000 from British East Africa lost their lives, besides many others of whose disappearance no record remains. The rest returned, but not in the same spirit in which they went. They had been subjected to new influences and a new discipline; they had travelled far outside the old barriers of tribal society; they had mixed with men of their own colour, but of far different conceptions, from all parts of the continent. They had learnt to set aside with scarcely a thought the most rigid tribal taboos, in such matters as the handling of corpses for burial. Their home-bred notions of right and wrong were turned upside down. The old superstitious reverence for tribal authority and inherited belief was scattered to the winds. Nor can it be said that any other machinery of discipline or conduct was set up in its place. Respect for a superior officer, loyalty to an official leader, ready obedience to the word of command, were but the passing conditions of life in the field, to be cast aside like a worn-out uniform when military service ended.

The young stalwart at the outset was recruited for the British cause; he was eager, pathetically eager, with all the enthusiasm of the spirited negro, to accept the word of a missionary or government official that the great conflict was his affair as deeply as the European's, and trusted that good service, loyally carried out, would bring recognition and due reward. The horrors and hardships of a distant and terribly prolonged campaign, the neglect of his material needs, the breaches of contract and of plighted word under stress of military necessity and unforeseen conditions, the utter lack of sympathy and comprehension often displayed by white superiors who were strangers to his tribe and his habits —these things combined to destroy the belief, which a shorter campaign might have generated, in the infallibility of the white officer as a leader and friend.

Upon the top of the war, when he returned to his people, longing to enjoy again the delights of home and the luxury of family life, came the famine with its 14,000 deaths, and the influenza scourge, a further gift from overseas, which carried off 155,000 of the population.

Labour Questions

After all this, the native of Kenya Colony remains a child—sophisticated in the ways of civilized life, good and evil as he has seen it, but still a child. He has learnt that he is an entity, a unit in the empire, not merely a member of an obscure tribe, hidden away from the great world. He has acquired ideas of politics. He knows that the hut tax is not a universal institution; he knows that not every tribe is subject to the parental authority of a Government so strong and methodical and exact that its "advice" and "encouragement" as to the obligations of labour and the duty of docile submission amount almost to direct force. Having discovered within himself the seeds of race consciousness, he looks at the white settler, with his ever-increasing demands for native labour, he looks at the well-to-do Indian trader in the well-built settlement, compares the Indian's house with his own, and the Indian's restless attitude toward European authority with his own expected docility. He dimly feels that the white settler to-day worships economic necessity as the highest law, even as the white officer upheld military necessity as the force before which all men everywhere must bow the knee; and the person always required to bow is the native African. He begins to observe that the Indian claims equality with the European and is aggrieved beyond all measure if he thinks this is denied him, but the same Indian scouts the notion of being treated as on a level with the native, born of the country.

Then come the vexed local questions, dull and uninteresting to the Englishman at home, but of vital concern to the African villager—the tenure of his little

scrap of land, the legal liability of the native to undertake road-making, and the ever-present demands of the incoming settlers. A new Governor is appointed after the war who has been a distinguished soldier, and is anxious to do what he can for British soldiers, some of whom, after arduous service have settled down in the country, attracted by its budding possibilities and by the outdoor life. An ex-soldier settlement scheme is drafted in which accuracy of detail and mature consideration are sacrificed to the exigencies of the case. Commercial interests support the enterprise and somewhat magnify its advantages. New and inexperienced settlers, some of them with little aptitude for the pioneer task, enter upon this new life and find that their rosy anticipations are not fulfilled in a moment. In many cases the land offers but a remote prospect of a livelihood; railways are first needed, and more roads if the crops are to be marketed, and above all, labour must be found at a price which will come within the reach of new settlers, limited as to capital. Many of the settlers give up in disgust; the rest turn desperately to Government, demanding help in carrying on the task to which the Government has invited them. The Government cannot turn a deaf ear to the appeal; it attempts to stimulate the flow of labour, and as direct compulsion by force and fine is not legally admissible, an effort is made to attain the same end by indirect methods.

The Great Decision

The native of Kenya is now in contact at all points with the stronger races of East and West. His old methods and habits will not do. Old customs, faiths, hopes, have been shattered and destroyed, not by the missionary, not by the official, not by the trader, not by the soldier, not by any one agency, and not of deliberate intent, but as the inevitable result of the impact with the hard world. The missionary and the official in the past worked together to maintain whatever was of value in the old order, and preserve the social order from disintegration.

The missionary long struggled to support the Government in its effort to maintain the efficiency of the old native administration. He would gladly have upheld the power and prestige of tribal rulers; but the ruling families themselves struck the blows which broke down the shaky edifice. Its foundations had given way and its equilibrium was in any case gone. It may be that an old and dilapidated building must be pulled down and cleared away before a new and stronger can be put up, but the destroyers and the builders must both have a clear idea as to what is going on and what is to be done.

The alarming feature of the present situation is the suddenness and vehemence which have characterized the destruction of the old, and the absence—the almost complete absence—of definite plans for reconstruction in the interests of the native people. The government official is prone to be satisfied if only the people remain outwardly quiescent and the state revenue continues to increase in proportion to the expenditure. The white settler has the one idea of economic necessity; he has an enormous thirst for labour, and he sees potential labourers by the million—human labour machines who, if only they were machines and nothing more, could be used to convert thousands of square miles of land into dividend-making plantations.

The great decision which Kenya Colony has now to make is between religious principle and economic need. The native is ready either to trust the European or to distrust. He has had strong impulses in both directions. He is willing to labour, but not to be forced to labour. He is willing to obey, provided his leaders know how to command. He wants to learn, but not merely that he may be the better mechanical tool. He wants to rise, not to be held down.

The missionary puts forward his plan. He holds that no social order will emerge, no peace will be attained, without a new social gospel and Jesus Christ. He says that there will be no advancement and no prosperity

worth having unless the native is uplifted into the light of Christ and yearns for the salvation of Jesus the Lord. There will be advancement; there will be prosperity—when the soul is saved. This must come first. Education must be not a mere training in manual labour—it must include this, and more; it must be such as will bring the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ within reach. Obedience—yes, this is necessary, and it will come. Submission—yes, when the soul has submitted itself first to God. Labour—this is vital; we learn the value of human toil when we know that God will bless the fruits. The rôle of the Christian missionary is to make the foundations secure, and human security acts only on the power of Christ to guide, strengthen, and comfort the hearts of men.

The choice lies between Christian faith, as the foundation of personal effort and racial strength, on the one hand, and the soulless economic theory of a competitive world, the stronger race crushing the weaker. It lies between the conception of a human being, black or white, as a child of God or as a mechanical contrivance for the production of wealth. On this decision rests the future of Kenya Colony—whether Christ or capital shall be the arbiter of the destinies of the equatorial races. It is certain that Christ and capital cannot both be master. The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be relegated to mere departmental activity in the village schools. He must dominate the colony or be dethroned. His Gospel is either the organic whole of human activity embodied in a creed, or is a mere superstition which we should all do well to divest ourselves of. Kenya Colony needs one thing more than labour, more than capital, more than efficient administration. It needs education which will induce labour, provide capital, repress racial feeling, and quell suspicions; it needs now, urgently and abundantly, throughout its villages and through its native teachers, the education of the soul in the knowledge of the love of God.

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